

Footballer is facing trial

FORMER Southend United footballer Lee Barnard is to stand trial over an alleged attack.

One-time Billericay resident Barnard, who now plays for Southampton, is charged with assault, in connection with an incident outside a nightclub.

It was said to have happened outside the White House bar in Southampton, last October and left a 27-year-old man with head injuries.

Southampton magistrates sent Barnard, 26, of Ocean Village, Southampton, for trial at Southampton Crown Court on June 8. He was freed on unconditional bail.

Accused's Essex ban

A MAN accused of burglary has been banned from Essex while he awaits trial.

Niculai Stoica is charged with burgling a house in Vardon Drive, Leigh, on April 7. Stoica, 35, of Sunnydene Gardens, Wembley, North London, appeared at Southend Magistrates' Court and was freed on bail, on condition he stays out of the county other than to keep appointments.

Alexandru Calin, 30, of St Andrews Road, East Ham, and George Tanca, 30, of no fixed address, are also charged with burglary.

Fire hazard tree may go

A COLLEGE wants to cut down a hornbeam tree to improve access for fire vehicles.

Seevic College has applied for planning permission to remove the tree from its grounds in Runnymede Chase, Thundersley.

The college says it is needed to improve access for high-reach fire tenders to a car park behind the main building. The access problems came to light after a fire in a toilet at the college last month.

BASILDON and Thurrock people are being invited to have a say about plans for fewer beds in community hospitals. NHS South West Essex is seeking views on its intermediate care bed review by Friday, May 13 at www.swessex.nhs.uk

FIREFIGHTERS were called to Debenhams Lakeside Shopping Centre branch to deal with a fire in a cleaning room. The fire broke out at 10.13am on Wednesday and was put out within 20 minutes.

GOVERNMENT WILL PAY £1.2M TOWARDS TRAVELLER ACTION



■ Flashpoint – angry scenes as traveller Catherine McCann confronts bailiffs during an eviction last year at the Hovefields site in Wickford

Picture: LUAN MARSHALL BA35347_44

Surprise Whitehall cash for evictions

THE Government has agreed to pay £1.2million towards evicting about 96 traveller families from the illegal Dale Farm site.

The funding will go towards the total cost of clearing the Crays Hill site, which some fear could run to £18million, including policing costs.

The Department for Communities and Local Government had previously rejected a request for more than £3million, so the news has been welcomed by Basildon Council.

There is still no news on whether the Home Office will part-fund the possible £10.4million the evictions could cost Essex Police.

Tory council leader Tony Ball said: "We were expecting no Government funding, so it was a surprise."

"It is not as much as we had

By JON AUSTIN

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hoped for, but it is the first sign the Government accepts this is a national, and not just a local issue for Basildon."

However, Mr Ball stressed the money would not necessarily be used to reduce the council's £8million share of the budget for the evictions.

He said: "This simply takes our total budget to £9.2million for the evictions."

However, Basildon and Billericay MP John Baron thinks the funding should go to Essex Police if the force fails to get all the money it needs from the Home Office.

He said: "After months of lobbying by the council and myself, this is a small step in the right direction, given the department initially refused all funding."

"There is still a big funding

gap in the policing costs, which we are looking to the Government to fill, and these negotiations are ongoing."

Grattan Puxon, campaigner for the travellers, said the Government decision showed it supported the eviction against the advice of the United Nations and Council of Europe.

He added: "This is even more public money going towards a solution which is not a solution."

Council officials have already been to Dale Farm to record the personal details of camp residents, in preparation for evictions.

Mr Puxon said families had been given until the end of the month to fill out forms and give them back to the council.

He added: "We still hope to challenge the decision at the High Court, on grounds the council is not considering per-

sonal circumstances. There is one man who is now bed-bound and cannot live on the roadside, another with severe learning disabilities and a number of pregnant women."

"The action proposed is disproportionate."

It is not as much as we had hoped for, but it is the first sign the Government accepts this is a national, and not just a local issue for Basildon

Minister: More powers New sites hotline

COMMUNITIES and Local Government secretary Eric Pickles has once again promised new measures to tackle illegal traveller sites, ahead of the local elections.

Mr Pickles, Tory MP for Brentwood, first promised action after his Government took power last May.

He said it would scrap regional traveller site targets which obliged Basildon to provide 66 new pitches, Thurrock 44 and other

south Essex councils 15 each.

He also promised the Government would make it harder for travellers to move on to land, then apply for planning permission to stay.

Mr Pickles said: "We are giving councils the power and discretion to protect the environment and help rebuild community relations."

"Clearer planning guidelines will make the planning system easier for all to understand."

COUNCIL officials will be on red alert over the extended Easter bank holiday weekend, on the lookout for travellers moving on to new sites in the area.

Banks holidays – when council offices are closed – have often been used in the past by travellers as a time to start new illegal sites.

This time, Basildon Council has set up a hotline on which suspicious developments can be reported over the long weekend.

Council leader Tony Ball said: "We are always vigilant around bank holidays and will take all necessary steps, including applying for pre-emptive injunctions, should intelligence say land has come into traveller ownership."

"We already have injunctions in place on other land already owned in the borough by travellers."

The council's hotline number is 01268 286622.